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# A SHORT HISTORY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN JAPAN BEFORE THE RESTORATION

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# A SHORT HISTORY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN JAPAN BEFORE THE RESTORATION.\*

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## CHAPTER I CHANGES IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS.

### 1. SOCIETY BASED ON THE *SHIZOKU* (氏族) SYSTEM (CLAN SYSTEM).

**The constitution of the *shizoku*.** The political and social organisations in Japan of remote ages were based on the *shizoku* system. The *shizoku* means a community embracing a number of households of the same ancestry or those which believed themselves to be of the same ancestry. The households constituting it include not only those of direct descent but those of collateral lines. Each *shizoku* community had its head who ruled all component households, while each household was led by its master. To each of these *uji* (氏) (*shizoku*) belonged a body called *be* (部) or *tomo* (伴) and also another body called *yakko* (奴). Although an *uji* was a community of those of the same ancestry, such was not necessarily the case with the *be*. As they belonged to some *uji*, they came by degrees to assume the name of that *uji*, and finally regarded themselves as of the same ancestry as their chief, their claim being recognised by outsiders also. The *uji* was thus a community founded on the belief of its component units that they belonged to the same ancestry. The *uji* also worshipped their guardian god, which it called

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\* Abridged translation of my work entitled "*Social History of Japan*" (日本社會史) 1924.

*ujigami* (氏神), and their reverence for their *ujigami* served to strengthen the ties of community binding them together. Such being the case, it may well be said that the *uji* was a community consisting of those who were not only of the same ancestry but of the same religious faith.

**The *Kabane* (姓).** In connection with the *uji* system, it is necessary to make some explanation of the *kabane*. Some *kabane* were derived from the names by which persons were called or honorific titles that they enjoyed, and some were granted by the Imperial Court, while others were derived from the names of their hereditary offices. Thus, there was at first no clear distinction among the members of a community in regard to standing. As time went by, however, they came to symbolise the status or position peculiar to different families, and this distinction was officially recognised by the Imperial Court. A system relating to this was subsequently inaugurated under which the *kabane* was conferred on influential persons. In this way, the *kabane* came to indicate the status and standing of families.

**The *shizoku* system and the organisation of the State.** In the ancient days when the *shizoku* system operated in perfect form, the administration of the State was conducted along the lines of this system. To begin with, in those times the *uji* (families) were inseparably associated with Government offices. All offices, big and small, were hereditarily held by the *uji-no-kami* (氏上) (patriarchs or heads of the *uji*). For instance, the *o-omi* (大臣) who were in charge of the State administration were appointed from among the heads of *uji* of the Imperial lineage, while the *o-muraji* (大連) offices were assigned to the heads of *uji* of the *kami* (神 deity) lineage. The *kuni-no-miyatsuko* (國造) and *tomo-no-miyatsuko* (伴造) offices, the occupants of which participated in local and sectional administrative business, were also held by the heads of certain *uji*. Thus, there existed a close relationship between the administrative organs and the *uji*.

Regarding the rule of the country, although the territory over which the Emperor held sway gradually widened in

extent, not all the people in Japan were under the direct rule of the Emperor in those days. Then the territory held directly by the Imperial *uji*, that is, by the Emperor and the members of the Imperial Family, and its inhabitants only were under the direct rule of the Emperor. Over all other regions the Emperor had no direct sovereignty or control; they were ruled by him only indirectly through the heads of the *uji* concerned. In other words, the Emperor, as the head of the Imperial *uji*, directly ruled the territory and its inhabitants belonging to the Imperial *uji*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in his capacity as sovereign of the country he controlled the heads of all other *uji*, who had under their direct rule their respective regions and people. The *shizoku* system was nothing more or less than an administrative system.

Thus, it will be seen that in remote times in this country, social order was established along consanguineous lines, and the State was organised on the basis of this order. Such being the case, people of high social standing, or in other words, those of noble pedigree who possessed great wealth and many people under their direct rule, occupied high administrative posts. For instance, *o-omi* and *o-muraji* were higher than *omi* (臣) and *muraji* (連) in both official and social standing, while *omi* and *muraji* were of higher standing, politically and socially, than *kuni-no-miyatsuko* and *tomo-no-miyatsuko*. Higher still than *o-omi* and *o-muraji* was the Emperor. Those who constituted the nobility in those days had *uji* and *kabane*. So also did the hereditary heads of the various *be* and the chiefs of local tribes. A class of people called the *be*, who engaged in various kinds of industry and other activities as followers of these high-class people, assumed the name of the *uji* to which they belonged, though they did not possess any *kabane*. They were semi-free people, whose social position was much lower than that of the nobility. Further below in rank were the *yakko* who had neither *uji* nor *kabane*, but possessed *na* (personal name) only. These were slaves, pure and simple. The people

belonging to the *be* and the *yakko* classes lived by labour as the governed classes. In the society of those days, all service or occupations were, generally speaking, hereditary.

In short, there was no distinction yet between the social system and the State organisation. Both were based on a combination of *shizoku* (*uji* families). The *shizoku* system not only furnished the nucleus of the social organisation of ancient times but formed the basis of matters, administrative, military and religious.

## 2. SOCIETY FOUNDED ON THE *GUNKEN* (郡縣) SYSTEM (PREFECTURAL SYSTEM).

**The collapse of the *shizoku* system.** With the changes of the times, the *shizoku* system, which constituted the nucleus of the political and social organisations of this country in ancient days, came to engender many evils, until it underwent a complete change in the Taikwa Reform.

In politics, various powerful *uji* began to act with increasing arrogance, and rivalry for power and reciprocal hostility set in. This led to the ruin of these *uji* one after another, until the sovereign power of the State reverted to the Emperor. In the meantime, the population went on increasing year after year, with the result that it became impossible for people belonging to the same *uji* to live in one and the same district to the exclusion of all others, and a commingling of those belonging to different *uji* became unavoidable. As the proverb "Near-by strangers are better than relatives afar" has it, consanguineous relations came to be held of less importance than the territorial ties that bound inhabitants of the same region. This gradually paved the way for the creation of regional bodies in place of communities bound by consanguineous ties. Furthermore, the importation of Chinese and Korean civilisations and systems in rapid succession rendered it impossible for the increasing desires of the noble classes to be satisfied by the economic system so far ruling. If considered from this point of view only, it was

inevitable that reform of some kind should be effected. Confucianism and Buddhism, which were introduced into this country, were incompatible with the ideas underlying the *shizoku* system and the faith of ancestorworship, and they awakened in the people individualistic ideas, which ran counter to the community ideas, which had been prevalent before.

Owing to various stimulations and changes, coming both from within and from without, the *shizoku* system had been gradually decaying. Advantage was taken of the fall of the Soga family from its high estate to establish the direct rule of the Emperor over the entire territory and people of the country, and for the creation of an authoritative State in which rule was detached from the *shizoku* system. In other words, a society based on the *gunken* system came into being. This embodies the Taikwa Reform.

**The organisation of the State after the Taikwa Reform.** In the Taikwa Reform, four great policies were proclaimed, namely, the establishment of the *gunken* system, the alteration of administrative districts, the reform of the land system and the collection of various taxes. These certainly embodied a revolutionary change of the political and social organisations.

In the days when the *shizoku* system operated, the Emperor's rule of the territory and people was only indirect, except over such territory and people which belonged to the Imperial *uji*, but in the Taikwa Reform, the private ownership of land and people was prohibited, and they were put under the direct control of the State. Moreover, the custom of hereditary occupation of Government offices by the heads of the *uji* was done away with, and a new system was introduced under which men of talent, even if they belonged to the lower grades of *uji*, were given high Government offices in which they could participate in the administration of State affairs. In consequence, the heads of *uji* very often held Government offices subordinate to those occupied by some of their followers. In this way, the consideration of pedigree was left out of all account in the choice of occupants of high

Government offices, and the State administration was made absolutely independent of the *shizoku* system. The administrative organisation, which was formerly based on the *shizoku* system, was so changed that the Central Government was divided into eight Departments embracing many offices, and *kokushi* (國司) and *gunshi* (郡司) officials were appointed to administer local affairs. This is what was called the *gunken* system. With the introduction of this system, the social and political importance of the *uji* entirely disappeared.

In consequence of the Taikwa Reform, the *be* class of people, public and private, was abolished, and most of these people were converted into *ryomin* (良民) or common law-abiding people, while a section continued their servile existence. That class of people possessing *uji* and *kabane*, formed the nobility. As Buddhism prospered, the Buddhist priests came to constitute a special class, wielding an influence in no wise inferior to that of the nobility. The *ryomin* were free citizens who chiefly engaged in the cultivation of *handen* (班田 fields granted by the Government). In those days, there were many slaves, who, forming the working classes, played an important part in supplying industrial labour, in putting waste land under cultivation and in many other directions.

### 3. SOCIETY BASED ON THE *SHOEN* (莊園) SYSTEM (MANOR SYSTEM).

**The rise of aristocracy.** In the Taikwa Reform, the *shizoku* government gave way to the *gunken* system, and Government offices were thrown open to talent. But in the Central Government, the *uji* of influence tried hard to exclude one another until the Fujiwara family monopolised political power. This brought aristocracy into being, and it appeared as though things had reverted to *shizoku* politics. In the provinces, with the development of the *shoen* system, the old system of private ownership of land and people returned, and the principle of the public ownership of land was under-



mined. The Heian period may, in these circumstances, rightly be called the age of *shizoku* politics or of aristocracy in fact, if not in name.

The Taikwa Reform was not necessarily prompted by the general progress of civilisation among the people. In those days, the people as a rule derived no benefit from the splendid civilisation that then existed. It prevailed in limited circles only; it was enjoyed by the nobility and other upper-class people exclusively. The capital was built on a magnificent scale, and the noblemen who lived there peacefully developed luxurious habits and indulged in the pleasures of poetical composition and musical performances. The masses, on the other hand, had nothing to do with the civilisation of those days, being condemned to a life of penury. Owing to the exceedingly inadequate means of communication then available between the capital and the provinces, it was extremely difficult for the Central Government to deliver its orders to the provinces and get them obeyed. The civilisation in the central parts of the country did not extend to the provinces. On the whole, the civilisation of Japan in the Heian period was the civilisation of Kyoto, the then capital, and nothing more than that.

In short, although a brilliant civilisation existed among a section of the upper-class people in the Heian period, as in the preceding Nara period, there was a lack of communication and contact between the upper and lower classes and between the capital and the provinces. To make matters worse, land had fallen more and more into private possession and the *shoen* system finally came into existence. This system brought various new social phenomena and problems, and a peculiar social order eventually developed out of it.

**The organisation of the State based on the *shoen*.**  
In the Taihoryo, the memorable Ordinance issued in the Taiho era, the principle was laid down that land should be public property and not be owned by private individuals. This system soon crumbled away, however. Many private fields were put under cultivation in the shape of the so-called *shoen*.

In those days, land formed the sole property. Since the basic principle of public ownership of land failed to operate and the cultivation of private fields was officially recognised, fields of various kinds, the private ownership of which was forbidden under the system then ruling, gradually fell into quasi-private possession. The Imperial Court, shrines and temples, peers in Kyoto and local men of influence strove to add to their landed property, and powerful persons often abused their position and influence to possess themselves of the fields of others. The land controlled by *kokushi* (provincial authorities) in their official capacity was a public possession, and the people living thereon had the duty of paying taxes and other imposts, but the land annexed in the manner stated above was what was called the *shoen* of the shrines, temples and powerful families concerned, and these *shoen* enjoyed a sort of extraterritoriality in that they were practically exempt from all imposts. Such being the case, some landowners in the provinces voluntarily contributed their land to local magnates with a view both to evading public exactions under their protection and to adding to their local influence. As the land belonging to temples also enjoyed similar exemptions, there were cases where people either contributed their farms and estates to temples or built temples on their own authority so as to secure such exemptions for their own benefit on the pretext that the land belonged to these temples. In this way, local magnates gained more and more influence, and the lands of small farmers were gradually annexed by them, with the result that the whole country threatened to become *shoen*-ised.

As afore-said, the *shoen* was exempt from the duty of paying taxes to the Central Government. The inhabitants on the *shoen* vowed allegiance to the lord of the district and tilled the land, paying taxes to the lord. Thus, the land and its people were turned into the private possessions of their lord, instead of being the public land and public citizens as in the former period. The result was that the authority exercised by the Central Government over the provinces was

considerably weakened. The *shoen* was virtually independent of the rule of the Central Government, and there was no connection or unity whatever between these *shoen* districts. Although in the organisation of the State of those days, there existed a Central Government, it existed only in name. The situation actually prevailing then was the rival and mixed existence of limited areas of public land belonging to the State, and extensive *shoen* land belonging to the Imperial Family, peers, local magnates and temples.

I have already mentioned the practice of annexing land freely resorted to in those days, and this led to the creation, on the one hand, of those who, as owners of extensive tracts of land, wielded great influence, and, on the other hand, of many discontented people, who were either unable to own any piece of land or, deprived of their land, obliged to clear out of their native districts. Brigandage became rampant in many provinces in consequence, but the Central Government was powerless to suppress it. In the meantime, local magnates gradually increased their military power. In order to protect themselves against invaders, they kept many retainers and followers. In this manner, the way was steadily paved for the acquisition of political influence by military leaders.

#### 4. SOCIETY BASED ON THE DECENTRALISED HOKEN (封建) SYSTEM (FEUDAL SYSTEM)

**The meaning of *hoken* (feudalism).** The term *hoken* is used in contrast to the term *gunken*. In the *gunken* system, the country had for its head the Ruler who superintended State administration in fact as well as in name. Under this system, the whole country was divided into many administrative districts called *gun* or *ken*, to each of which Government officials were appointed to transact administrative business. These officials did not own, as their feuds and subjects, the districts and people which they were ordered to rule. Nor were their offices hereditary or permanent with them. They were occasionally transferred to other posts in differ-

ent districts. On the contrary, in the *hoken* system, the sovereign existed only in name, and the feudal lords, who nominally vowed allegiance to the sovereign, possessed lands of their own, which, with a few exceptions, were ruled by their descendants generation after generation. The inhabitants in these feuds belonged to their respective lords as their subjects, and pursued each his own vocation under their rule. The relationship of master and servant existing between the lord and the inhabitants of his fief, and the feudal character of territory were the two essential factors of the feudal system.

The feudal system was born of a desire for a secured existence which has become general after an unsettled and insecure social life which had previously prevailed. In turbulent times, it is only natural that national power should become decentralised, and it is certainly no easy task to bring this disrupted society back into unity so as to form a perfect centralised State. This is especially so when the creation of an unrest and unsettled society was the result of the effeteness of the Central Government, which caused the local magnates to administer local affairs by their own initiative and energy. In other words, the creation of an unsettled society was due to the gradual diminution of State power, with the corresponding extension of private power. The only way to bring a stable society into existence in such circumstances was, therefore, to develop the system of private protection so that society might be bound by ties such as exist between master and servant. This is the reason why the feudal system sprang up after the turbulent times. At the beginning, the feudal system partook largely of the nature of divided authority, but later it gradually assumed the character of centralisation of power. Small feuds were by degrees annexed by bigger ones, and the bigger ones gained more influence in consequence until they conceived the idea of undertaking the task of maintaining the stability of the State as a whole.

In short, territorial and personal connections formed the

essential factors of the feudal system, and one prominent feature of the society based on the feudal system was the existence of the relationship of master and servant between the governing and the governed classes. With the changes of the times, however, the feudal system took on different aspects, as has already been explained. There is a wide difference between the feudal system that ruled in the Kamakura period and after, and that ruling in the Tokugawa period. The one was characterised by decentralisation of power, while the other was contrariwise marked by centralisation of power. For this reason, the feudal system of the middle ages of this country is called the decentralised feudal system.

When we say that the political and social organisations of Japan in and after the Kamakura period became feudal, we do not simply mean that the samurai class became feudal. We also mean that society as a whole became feudal. For instance, the relationship of master and servant similar to that which existed in the samurai class subsisted between masters and their employees in commercial circles. The same spirit of devotion as was displayed by samurai towards their lords was shown by servants to their masters among the common people. Servants stood to their employers in the relationship of lord and retainer. In those days, vocational classes sprang up, and those belonging to these classes gradually gained in social influence. Those of the same trade combined to monopolise certain lines of business among themselves, allowing no incursion by outsiders into their settled spheres of activity. The relationship of master and servant was firmly established and class distinctions were recognised, with the result that all people found their proper positions. It was one characteristic of the feudal society that privileges were held in respect. Such was in the natural order of things as the stability of society was the aim of the feudal system.

**The ruling spirit of insubordination.** The social conditions underwent marked changes during the period between

the Namboku period (Southern and Northern Dynasty) and the Muromachi period. The word "insubordination" truthfully illustrates the state of things prevailing in those times. The will to supplant those of higher but effete classes manifested itself in all walks of life. It was, in a word, an age of rule by deputation. Not only in politics but in all circles, usurpation of power was the order of the day. The head temples were despoiled of their power by branch temples, and master priests were evicted from their places of authority by their disciples. Particularly noteworthy were the attempts made by the low-class people to supplant the upper-class people and the poor to control the rich.

The constant and long-drawn-out disturbances in those days deprived all classes, high and low, of their security of living, and all were reduced to financial straits, morality falling to a very low level. While there were some people who amassed enormous wealth, there were a large number of people who were reduced to penury. The low-class people, who were condemned to an insecure existence under the pressure constantly brought to bear upon them by this disparity between the rich and the poor, gradually nursed a spirit of insubordination against the high class people, and this discontent found violent expression in a sort of social movement called *tsuchi ikki* (土一揆 riots). These riots reflect the prevalent spirit of insubordination in those days.

##### 5. SOCIETY BASED ON THE CENTRALISED FEUDAL SYSTEM.

**The establishment of the centralised feudal system.** When he was appointed Shogun in the 8th year of Keicho (1603) and assumed the supreme military power, Tokugawa Iyeyasu held sway over the various feudal lords by virtue of his office as Shogun, on the one hand, and was the lord of his own feud, on the other. His feud, or *Tenryo* (天領) as it was called, covered one fourth of the area of the whole country, if put together. It was distributed in 47 out of the

68 provinces, into which the country was divided. All the places of political importance and all big cities constituting commercial and industrial centres were under his direct control, and he appointed *bugyo* (奉行) and *daikwan* (代官) officials to govern these places. All other districts except those belonging to the Imperial Family, shrines and temples belonged to the *daimyo* (feudal lords), and the administration of affairs in these fiefs was, on the whole, left to the self-rule of their lords. Among these fiefs were those belonging to the three branch Tokugawa families in Kii, Owari and Mito provinces, and the fiefs belonging to *fudai daimyo* (譜第大名 feudal lords in hereditary vassalage to the Tokugawa) and those belonging to *tozama daimyo* (外様大名 feudal lords not in hereditary vassalage) were, so to speak, interwoven with one another. In the Jokyo-Genroku era (1684-1703), the *daimyos* with a fief yielding more than 10,000 *koku* (石) of rice totalled 240, of which 45 produced over 100,000 *koku* of rice. Whereas the fief of Lord Maeda, of Kaga province, who was the most important *daimyo*, did not produce more than 1,020,000 *koku*, the Tokugawa Shogunate held a fief, the quantity of rice produced in which was variably put at from 4,000,000 to 8,000,000 *koku*. In any case, it is clear that the Tokugawas possessed an influence far superior to that of the *daimyos*. It is, of course, undeniable that the wide extent of the *Tenryo* (the Shogunate fief) put the Tokugawas in the predominant position, but at the same time the fact must not be lost sight of that the influence of the Tokugawas was further enhanced by the wise policies pursued by able and perspicuous Shoguns, who successively held the exalted position in the early days of the Tokugawa Shogunate. By inaugurating the *sankin kotai* (参勤交代) system (alternative sojourns of *daimyos* in Edo, as Tokyo was then called, in the Shogun's service), distributing the fiefs adroitly, arranging inter-marriages between *daimyos*, etc. and imposing levies on rich *daimyos* in connection with engineering works in Edo, the Tokugawa Shogunate held the *daimyos* well in hand. While on the other hand,

it followed the exclusionist policy towards outside countries so as to avert disturbing influences and stimulants from abroad against the maintenance of order at home. These measures combined to enhance the power and influence of the Tokugawa Shogunate to the diminution of the influence of the *daimyos*. Thanks also to the some measures, the centralised feudal system was perfected and tranquillity was maintained at home during the régime of the Tokugawa Shogunate for more than 250 years.

The centralised feudal system obtained in the Tokugawa Shogunate, and historians regard this period as one in which the feudal State was consummated. It, therefore, follows that the establishment of the class system and the rigorous maintenance of the relationship of master and servant, which are the characteristics of a feudal society, were eminently manifest in this period. These characteristics were evident in many circles. For instance, in politics the popular slogan was to adhere to the old rules and discard the new ways, and official inspectors called *ō-metsuke* (大目付) and *metsuke* (目付) were appointed to see that the Shogunate orders were faithfully obeyed. Everything went by the established etiquette and rules, and there was no freedom of speech or of the press such as it then was. Although the way was opened for the secret submission of views to the authorities, free debate of political matters by masterless *samurai* was frowned upon. The system of *kabunakama* (株仲間 guild system) operated in all kinds of pursuits, and nobody outside the group was allowed to engage in the same trade. An apprentice was promoted to the status of an artisan after a certain period of apprenticeship. He then had to go through what was called *yadobairi* and it was not until he had formally introduced himself to those in the group and obtained their formal sanction that he was allowed to become one of the trade. From the study of Chinese classics, Japanese poetry and the military arts of archery, fencing and horsemanship down to the light accomplishments of the tea ceremony, flower arrangements, etc., the established formality was rigidly



adhered to. Once one became a pupil under a master of a certain school, no matter whether it was in regard to learning or light accomplishments, one was forbidden to turn one's back on the learning or the accomplishments of that particular school under penalty of being stigmatised as a heretic. These are characteristic of a feudal society, and it is no wonder that a society with such characteristics should have been marked by inactivity and conservatism.

**Exclusionism.** In the Tokugawa period, the centralised feudal system was established at home, while towards the outside world an exclusionist policy was pursued. This brought about an age of tranquillity extending over 250 years. To close the country was not, however, the original intention of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Tokugawa Iyeyasu, the first Shogun, laid down the fundamental policy of peaceful intercourse with other countries, and endeavoured to gain profit by promoting trade. The policies adopted by Spain and Portugal towards our country at the time were unfortunately too much wedded to what is called mercantilism. Those countries were obsessed not only by the desire to acquire gold and silver but by designs of territorial acquisition. They sent to these shores missionaries together with merchants, so that they might control the spiritual world of this country through the religious propaganda of these missionaries, while deriving material interests from the trade with this country, which they strove to develop through the efforts of their merchants. As these political ambitions were gradually revealed, there arose differences and difficulties of varying kinds, which impeded the intercourse between these countries and Japan, eventually resulting in the adoption of the exclusionist policy by the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The exclusionist policy, contrary to the policy adopted in the early days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, revoked the throwing open of the country to foreigners. I will now explain how this policy was operated on several sides. Let me first consider how it affected the propagandism of Christianity. At first, the Tokugawa Shogunate connived at Christian

evangelical work, but after the eighteenth year of Keicho (1613), it was absolutely vetoed. As regards the travel abroad of Japanese citizens, it was at first encouraged, but later a general embargo was put on it, only the ships officially sanctioned were allowed to go abroad. After the thirteenth year of Kwanyei (1636), even this exceptional arrangement was done away with, and not only were people forbidden to go abroad but those who were abroad then were not allowed to come home. So far as the advent of foreigners to these shores is concerned, the Portugese were deported, contrary to the open door policy originally laid down, and the request of British subjects for permission to resume trade relations was rejected, Dutch and Chinese citizens only being allowed to engage in trade with Japanese at Nagasaki. The intercourse with the Dutch was more restricted than that with the Chinese, however, for they were allowed to take up their residence in the limited area of Deshima only. Lastly, as to the foreign trade. At first, the whole country was thrown open to foreign intercourse, but later the trade ports were reduced in number, and restrictions were put on methods of commercial transactions, the period of anchorage and sojourn. Nay, even the amount of trade was restricted. Thus it will be seen that at the beginning the Tokugawa Shogunate adopted the open door policy towards all countries, then closed the country to Portugal, and finally the country was closed to all countries except China and Holland. In short, the exclusionist policy was adopted by degrees. Moreover, as the trade relations with Holland and China remained unmolested, the exclusionist policy was by no means absolute.

## CHAPTER II

### SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN VARIOUS AGES.

#### 1. SOCIAL PROBLEMS DURING THE *SHIZOKU* REGIME.

The social problems in these days referred to land. Annexations of land gave rise to various questions.

**Annexations of land.** The agricultural age began in remote times in Japan, a fact which accounts for the importance which has always attached to land. As already explained, in the system ruling in remote days, the direct rule of the Emperor over the land and the people was limited to those belonging to the members of the Imperial Family. All other *uji* were led by their respective heads. They belonged to the Emperor only indirectly. Consequently, there existed two kinds of land—one owned by those of the Imperial lineage and the other owned by men of influence. As the land in the Imperial possession increased in extent year by year, so did the land owned by men of influence go on expanding. "Some annexed tens of thousands of acres of land, while others owned not the size of a pin's head", as an old writing has it. The tendency to annex land was manifest even in very ancient times. Some ambitious *uji* even attempted to annex estates belonging to the Imperial Family.

**The question of *uji* and *kabane*.** As already mentioned, pedigree was held in high esteem in these times. People of dignified *uji* and *kabane* occupied high positions, socially and politically, and these possessed themselves of extensive areas of land by utilising their positions. In point of wealth also, they occupied a superior position. In such circumstances, there developed a natural desire among the people generally for high *uji* and *kabane*, and some people went the length of forging pedigrees so as to secure a high social position and amass wealth. This was the cause of the confusion of *uji* and *kabane*, which it was attempted to adjust by the so-called *kukadachi* (神盟探湯) method. Thus, a disparity between the rich and the poor was marked in remote times already, and this bred problems of various kinds.

## 2. SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE *GUNKEN* RÉGIME.

The Taikwa Reform brought the form of government based on the *shizoku* system to ruin. It also prohibited the

private ownership of land and people, and the *handen* system was introduced, but the operation of this system was attended with supreme difficulties. The growth of population, the increase of human desires and the elevation of the standards of living caused a shortage of arable fields, and this led to the reclaiming from the wilderness and cultivation of private fields. The system of private ownership gradually supplanted the old system, and then the annexation of lands recurred. Besides the nobility and the common people, there sprang up many slaves from various causes. These slaves engaged in the cultivation of fields, the construction of temples and many works of labour by order of their masters.

**The grant and recovery of *handen* fields.** The grant and recovery of *handen* fields took place in regard to certain stipulated land. The fields to be supplied as *handen* were public property, and no private ownership was recognised regarding them, only usufruct being recognised as a matter of principle. Each household was supplied with a stipulated tract of land, and no single individual formed the subject of the right. When a child attained the age of six, a boy was given two *tan* (one *tan* 段 being .245 acres) and a girl two-thirds of the area, that is, one *tan* 120 *bu* (步). The land granted to each person was called *kubunden* (口分田).

This rule of granting and recovering *handen* fields was enforced comparatively widely at first in the country, but later it ceased to be enforced rigidly, partly because it involved troublesome procedure and partly because it was easily turned to account by crafty and fraudulent persons. Even in the *Gokinai* district, where, it being in close proximity to the capital, the authority of the Imperial Court ought to have been forcibly felt, the *handen* system failed to operate during a few score years. If this was the case in the *Gokinai* district, the state of things ruling in the outlying districts may well be imagined. Besides *kubunden*, there were various kinds of fields, which proved a serious impediment to the operation of the *handen* system. Moreover, with the increase of population, there occurred a shortage of fields, and this necessitated the

encouragement of cultivation of waste lands. In the seventh year of Yoro (723), an instruction was issued to all provinces ordering the cultivation of private fields. Under the new order, those who newly made ponds and put waste land under cultivation were allowed to own their new fields in three generations, while those who put waste land under cultivation by utilising the ponds and irrigation facilities already existing were allowed to own their new fields during their lifetime. In later years (743), this law was so revised as to turn such fields into the permanent property of their cultivators, as there was fear of such fields being looted and allowed to go to waste as the period for their restitution to the Government approached. After this, there developed a tendency for people to get private fields in preference to cultivated fields, which partook of the nature of *handen*, and the rich people vied with one another in putting waste land under cultivation. The result was that the private lands owned by influential families grew more extensive in area than public lands. In this way, the *handen* system gradually gave place to the so-called *shoen* system. The motive underlying the creation of the *handen* system was to rectify unfairness in the distribution of wealth by establishing the State ownership of all land, but this object was completely defeated, and through the introduction of the system of clearing land, the distribution of wealth became unfair again.

There also operated the *chin-so* (賃租) system in this period. By *chin* (賃) was meant the rent collected in advance at the time of sowing seeds in spring, while *so* (租) meant the payment of the rent at the time of harvesting crops in autumn. It was somewhat similar to the farm tenancy system introduced in later ages. Under this system, which recognised the transfer of the usufruct of land, the rich proceeded to annex lands, while the poor losing their lands were turned into tenant farmers. Thus, it will be seen that this system also contributed to the accentuation of the disparity between the rich and the poor.

The disparity between the rich and the poor. Annexa-

tions of lands caused a wider gulf between the rich and the poor, as already mentioned, and the great disparity that existed between them can be gathered from other facts also.

The Taihoryo (Ordinance of the Taiho Era) divided all households in the country into nine classes according to the amount of wealth they possessed. It is clear from the census registers of the day that slaves were mostly kept by households belonging to the higher orders. In other words, the majority of slaves were concentrated among a small number of the rich. This fact may be cited as one illustration of the great disparity then existing between the rich and the poor.

A register record compiled in the province of Echizen in the second year of Tempyo (730) and that compiled in the province of Tajima in the second year of Tempyo-Shoho (750) give the following number of the households of the different classes :—

	class 1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	others
Echizen	1	4	7	4	5	8	11	13	45	920
Tajima	—	—	—	—	2	2	3	11	69	327

From the above, it will be seen that there were very few households belonging to the upper classes, while those belonging to the lower classes were very numerous. This is another example testifying to the great disparity between the rich and the poor.

Needless to say, land was the only source of economic power in this period, and there operated the *kubunden* and the "private fields" systems, on the one hand, and the farm tenancy system was in force, on the other, the labour of slaves being utilised under the latter system. These facts formed the principal causes of the social problems of the day.

### 3. SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE SHOEN RÉGIME.

In this period, the more important social problems were furnished by the question of landownership and by the

vagrants who, deprived of their land and property, and unable to bear heavy burdens of taxation, forsook the places of their birth.

**The land question.** As already explained, the *kubunden* system was not enforced strictly, and the increase of population necessitated the cultivation of waste lands, which resulted in the increase of private fields, this rendering the operation of the *kubunden* system all the more difficult. After the law was enacted in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tempyo (743) under which private fields became the permanent property of their cultivators, there was a remarkable increase of private fields. As this caused many and far-reaching evils, prohibitory or restrictive orders were frequently issued, but all these efforts had little effect in checking the general tendency. The *shoen* fields went on increasing and public fields witnessed as remarkable a decrease. In the reign of the Emperor Gosanjo (1069-1073), an office was created with the object of adjusting matters relating to *shoen*. The idea was to create no new *shoen* fields and abolish those *shoen* fields, which were either of dubious origin or obstructive of the administration of State affairs. Earnest efforts were made to enforce this new rule, but the desired results were not reaped, as the authorities were powerless to apply the new rule to the possessions of the former *Kwanbaku* (關白), Fujiwara Yorimichi, and, moreover, as there were many fields which were created by Imperial order in the reign of the above-mentioned Emperor. In the reign of the Emperor Shirakawa, who succeeded the Emperor Gosanjo on the Throne, not only was this office abolished but there was a positive increase in the number of *shoen* fields belonging to temples, in consequence of the Emperor's adherence to Buddhism. In the reign of the Emperor Toba, the above office was again created, but as official investigations were not strictly conducted, no effectual check could be put on the increasing tendency of the *shoen*. As already explained, *shoen* fields enjoyed a sort of extraterritoriality, and there was consequently an increasing number of people who sought to evade public exactions under the

protection of local magnates by contributing their land to them. This practice accentuated the tendency to annex land, to make the gulf between the rich and the poor wider.

**The *rōnin* (vagrants) question.** In the closing days of the Heian era, the acreage of public fields and lands greatly decreased and the whole country threatened to be turned into *shoen*. As *shoen* fields were exempt from taxation, the local Government officials resorted to extortions in order to make up for the dwindling revenue resulting from this diminution of public fields and lands, and the poor people who could not bear heavy burdens were obliged to leave their native places for other districts. These poor people turned into what are called *rōnin* (浪人 vagrants) in the Ocho (Imperial régime) period.

Another cause of forced vagrancy was *suiko* (出舉). *Suiko* means the system under which the rice plants on official and private fields were rented to farmers in spring and the tenants paid the rent together with interest thereon after the harvest in autumn. This system was inaugurated from the worthy motive of relieving farmers in distress, but later it came about that the State expenditure was defrayed from the profit made out of the operation of this system, and even the rich were made to rent such rice plants and pay the stipulated dues. The interest on private *suiko* was, as a rule, 100 per cent. per annum, and that on public *suiko* 50 per cent. Although the quantities of rice plants to be rented out for *suiko* purposes were officially fixed according to the size and other circumstances of the provinces, the local Government officials rented out rice plants in excess of the stipulated quantities so as to pocket the balance. Men of influence and those under their protection refused to obey the orders of the local Government officials. They declined to rent the rice plants allotted to them. Again, some of those, who were obliged to rent, strove to escape the obligation by offering a bribe to the officials. In such circumstances, heavier burdens devolved on honest people who did not shirk the duty, and when the time for



paying their dues came round, they could not meet their obligations. When they were in financial straits, farmers rented high-interest rice plants, thoughtless of the future, only to find themselves unable to pay their dues when they were called upon to pay them in due time. In such cases, they had their houses, already hypothecated, confiscated. They also had to part with their fields and lower themselves to the position of labourers, until at last they were obliged to flee from their dear homes to become vagrants in strange provinces. Many of these unfortunate people settled down on *shoen* land, which was immune from taxation, and either were employed in the work of putting waste lands under cultivation or they engaged in divers menial works. In a sense, the *shoen* furnished a refuge for the people who had deserted their native places because of their inability to put up with extortions.

#### 4. SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE DECENTRALISED FEUDAL RÉGIME.

In this period, the whole country was divided among local men of power and influence. Many influential men asserted their authority everywhere, and the spirit of class antagonism pervaded the entire community. The war cry of rioters had the ring of a new class strife. Of the riot (*tsuchi ikki* 土一揆) I will treat in the next chapter. In this chapter I will deal with the land question and *tokusei* (徳政).

**The land question.** Landownership at this time was of a very complex nature. One tract of land had, besides its *de facto* lord, one or two or more *de jure* lords, who were called *honsho* (本所) or *ryoke* (領家). The owner of the land, who put it under cultivation, finding it impossible to stand the persecution of the local Government officials, chose to make a man of influence its nominal lord, and in some cases selected one or more nominal lords in a man or men of higher rank and influence. This led to joint ownership of one tract of land, and to the division of the profit accruing

from the land among its different lords. Such being the case, the actual income to each from a wide tract of land was comparatively small. As, moreover, the crops sometimes failed, the feudal Government did much to encourage thrift among the people. An anecdote of Saimyōji Nyūdō (Hōjō Tokiyori), an ex-Regent, sitting talking at night with no better relish than *miso* (bean-paste) to feast upon, and another of Matsushita Zenni, Tokiyori's mother, making a patch on a paper screen, illustrate the enthusiasm with which the campaign of thrift was carried on by the feudal Government.

Since the fief territory was the main source of revenue for the feudal Government, restrictions were put on the sale, mortgage transfer, etc. of the land. Even when a son succeeded to his father's fief, he was called upon to obtain the sanction of the feudal Government. With regard to the land which was newly bestowed on persons in recognition of their merits, its sale was prohibited, lest it should fall into the hands of those *samurai* who were not amenable to the control of the feudal Government, or of farmers and merchants, as it would impair the financial power of the Government. The custom of assigning the post of Shogun to Imperial Princes or *kuge*-nobles (公卿) opened the way for the spread of *kuge* tastes to Kamakura and other Kwantō districts, and luxurious habits came to prevail. The difficulty of living arising in consequence compelled *gokenin* (御家人 low-grade vassals of the feudal Government) to dispose of their land or mortgage it by some means or another. As preventive measures, the feudal Government laid down the rule that transactions in such land between *gokenin* should be effected at the original prince and that the land which passed into the hands of non-*gokenin* could be recovered without compensation. The poverty of the *gokenin* was, however, so great that these devices could not prevent their land from passing into other hands. As the last resort, the feudal Government adopted the *tokusei* system so as to invalidate the sale, lease and giving in pledge of land.

**Tokusei.** By *tokusei* is meant the practice of repudiating

all rights and obligations concerning contracts of sale, lease and mortgage signed within a certain stipulated period. It was in accord with the spirit of *tokusei* that the mortgage and sale of the land owned by *gokenin* was invalidated in the fourth year of Bunyei (1267). The Tokusei Order, which is most popularly cited, is the one issued on March 6th of the fifth year of Einin (1297). It consists of many clauses, the more important of which provide for the strict prohibition of the mortgage or sale of the landed property of *gokenin*, and for its restoration, without compensation, to the original owners of any such lands which were sold or mortgaged by *gokenin* to other *gokenin* in the past, except that which was sold or mortgage twenty years before by legal means. With regard to the land which had passed into the hands of non-*gokenin* or *bonge* (凡下), the above-mentioned prescription was not recognised. With regard to loans of money, it was stipulated that no lawsuit about such matters should be accepted. This rule applied to the people generally as well as to *gokenin*. An exception was, however, made in favour of those who pawned their things in order to borrow money from pawnbrokers (*do-sō* 土倉). This Tokusei Order, which was strikingly partial toward debtors, caused great uneasiness in economic circles, and it had the effect of depriving the *gokenin* of all means of raising money. In such circumstances, the Order was revoked after a year's operation. The extent of the shock that the Order caused to the economic world may be gathered from the fact that in the transactions effected, even after the cancellation of the Order, in regard to the sale or mortgage of land, deeds were prepared, in which was inserted that the seller or pawner undertook that he would never assert his claim to the land, even if another Tokusei Order were issued.

The Tokusei Order in the Kamakura period was intended for the repudiation of debts for the benefit of a *samurai* class called *gokenin*, but in the following Muromachi period, the low-class common people agitated for the issue of a Tokusei Order in their desire to get their repudiated. With

a view to compelling the feudal Government to accept their demand, they caused riots. The objects of the attack and spoliation of these rioters were always *sakaya* (酒屋), *do-sō* and similar rich parvenus. Since the days of the Hojo régime, the *sakaya* and *do-sō* played the part of monetary organs as money-lenders, and they belonged to the propertied class. The *tokusei* riots in the Muromachi period to say nothing of the Tokusei Order issued in the Kamakura Age are traceable to the growing disparity between the rich and the poor.

##### 5. SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE CENTRALISED FEUDAL RÉGIME.

The development of currency economies and the rise of the *chōnin* (町人) class in the Tokugawa period widened the gulf between the rich and the poor. It was the established policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate to maintain the class system and eliminate all causes inimical to this system. In the actual social life, however, there was a general impoverishment of the farmers and *samurai*, on the one hand, and the enrichment of the commercial and industrial people generally, on the other. This phenomenon caused many farmers to give up the plough to become merchants or artisans. The custom also came into vogue for *samurai* to adopt the sons of rich merchants with an eye to the wealth of the parents of their adopted sons. The Tokugawa Shogunate adopted various policies in order to check the tendency toward the increasing of the disparity between the rich and the poor or to dispose of this problem successfully. The more important among these policies were the prohibition of the sale of land, the issue of the *kien* order (棄捐令), the imposition of *goyōkin* (御用金), and the regulation of the price of rice. With regard to the popular agitations such as peasants' riots and rice-riots, I propose to deal with them in the next chapter.

**The prohibition of the sale of land.** In the Tokugawa period, the sale of land was vetoed. The prohibitory law in this respect was enacted in March of the twentieth year of

Kwanyei (1643), and it continued in force until the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The Mito clan was, however, free from this prohibition. As a matter of fact, land was pledged and allowed to pass into other hands on various pretexts, and as the transfer of land went on, such practices were legally prohibited. This law was promulgated because of the fear that if the sale of land was legally recognised, many farmers might lose their property. It was feared that the possession of more and more lands by rich men and the loss of their lands by small farmers might bring about a state of things in which all the lands belonging to a village might fall into the hands of one or two rich men of the village or possibly even into those of other villages. In short, the law aimed at preventing the desertion of their villages by impoverished farmers and the increase of the disparity between the rich and the poor in consequence of the annexations of land. The same motive underlay the restrictions on the partition of lands. The Shogunate feared that if the partition of lands on the part of small farmers among their children was allowed without restriction, there would be created numerous poor farmers, who could not make both ends meet, and so it prohibited the partition of lands, unless the farmer possessed an estate of more than one *cho* (2.45 acres) in acreage, which would yield more than ten *koku* (50 bushels) of rice. It does not appear that this prohibitory law was strictly enforced, however.

**The *Kien* Order.** In the first year of Kwansei (1624), Lord Matsudaira Sadanobu issued a famous order. In view of the fact that the accumulated debts contracted by *hatamoto* (旗本) and *gokenin* (low-grade direct retainers of the Tokugawa Shogunate) from money-lenders of the merchant class reduced many *samurai* families to distress, he issued an order under which all these debtors were excused from the duty of paying their debts, provided they were contracted before the fourth year of Temmei (1784). As regards the debts contracted after the fifth year of Temmei, the debtors were ordered to repay at the rate of three *ryo* (兩) a year for each 100 *hyo*

(俵 bales) of rice which they got as stipend from the Shogunate, irrespective of the amount of their debts, the interest to be paid being fixed at one *bu* (歩) per month for each fifty *ryo* borrowed. This order was the same as the Tokusei Order in the Kamakura period in nature, except for the difference that in this order provision was made for the instalment payments of some of the old debts. Fifty odd years later, the Tempo Reform was carried out. On December 14th of the fourteenth year of Tempo (1843), an order was suddenly issued, according to which *hatamoto* (debtors) were bidden to pay their debts to merchant-creditors in twenty-year instalments, without interest, regardless of the date of repayment of the debts. The above-mentioned two orders were designed to relieve the *samurai* class of the dire financial straits to which they were then reduced, but it incidentally throws a sidelight on the remarkable difference in point of wealth existing between the *samurai*, who constituted the ruling class, and the *chōnin*, or the governed class, at the time.

**Goyōkin.** *Goyōkin* is a levy which was temporarily and optionally imposed chiefly on *chōnin* in order to make good the deficit in the State treasury. The reason for this imposition was that while the *samurai* were the descendants of those who had rendered services to the State on various battle fields, and they themselves were serving the State by proceeding to Edo by turns under the *sankin kōtai* system, and farmers were producing foodstuffs by toiling on the farm all the year round, merchants sat idly and amassed big fortunes. That they were able to lead a peaceful life was all due to the favours conferred on them by the State. In order to repay these favours, it was argued, they ought to contribute a part of their wealth to the State coffer. The levy was a forced loan or a benevolence, to all intents and purposes. It was another attempt to check the growing wealth of the rich. It may be regarded in the light of an economic question arising between classes or the question of disparity between the rich and the poor.

The *goyōkin* device was frequently resorted to after the Horeki era (1751-1763), and the import was mainly levied on rich merchants in Edo, Osaka and other big cities. Some scholars of the day expressed approval of this system and urged the necessity of reducing the difference between the rich and the poor by checking the growth of wealth on the part of the rich. For instance, in his memorial to the Shogunate, Uyesaki Kuhachiro says:—"If all means fail to find the wherewithal, I advise you to levy *goyōkin* upon rich merchants in Edo, Kyoto, Osaka and all other cities in order to raise the money necessary to meet the State expences, while at the same time trying to relieve the farmers. I notice that even in these days rich tradespeople and merchants are making good profits. For many years past, the agricultural interests, which are the main source of the country's strength, have been declining, and the commercial interests, which are of secondary importance, have been prospering, with the result that things have reached a deadlock. In such circumstances, it is advisable that the surplus wealth of merchants should be collected to the end that the poverty of the farmers be lessened. Moreover, if you will see that farmers take rank of merchants in all things, farmers will gradually come to hold their occupation in due respect, and the number of those farmers who desert their native villages to lead town life now will decrease. While, on the other hand, merchants will come to envy the lot of farmers, whom they now hold in disdain. This will bring agriculture and commerce back into their proper position." Thus, he suggests that by imposing *goyōkin* on rich merchants, the deficit in the State revenue can be made good, on the one hand, and the class system can be maintained.

**The regulation of the price of rice.** In this period, *samurai* and farmers were suppliers of rice, while merchants and industrialists were consumers of the cereal. Their interests were in consequence in conflict. Fluctuations in the price of rice produced far-reaching effects on the financial position of the Shogunate and various clans, and on

the interests of all classes of society, so it was necessary not only for financial and economic reasons but for the harmonisation of the conflicting interests of different classes that the price of rice should be properly regulated. Although the *samurai* and farmers were desirous of the price being maintained at a high level, they did not like to excite discontent in commercial and industrial circles by disregarding their interests, for discontent might foment hostility among them against the *samurai* class and the destruction of the class system might result. So, they had to devise measures to prevent a violent rise in the price of rice. Thus, it will be seen that the regulation of the price of rice was undertaken not merely as an attempt to solve the question of the prices of commodities, but for the purpose of bringing the conflicting interests of all classes into harmony. Especially during and after the régime of Tokugawa Yoshimune, the eighth Shogun, various policies were adopted for forcing up or reducing the price of rice.<sup>1)</sup> Nothing definite is known as to the actual results of these measures, but it is clear that the price of rice was influenced more by the condition of the rice harvest than by artificial policies.

### CHAPTER III

#### VARIOUS PHASES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

In the previous chapter, I have given a brief explanation of social problems in various periods. Below I will dwell upon some social movements recorded in the history of the times.

##### 1. *TSUCHI IKKI* IN THE MUROMACHI PERIOD.

*Tsuchi ikki.* *Tsuchi ikki* means a riot caused by the populace. It is also called *tokusei ikki*, because such riots

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<sup>1)</sup> See my work "*The Regulation of the price of rice in the Tokugawa Régime*" (徳川幕府の米價調節) 1924.



were very often caused for the purpose of forcing the Government to issue a Tokusei Order. As already mentioned, the Tokusei Order in the Kamakura period was meant to repudiate the debts of *gokenin*, but the *tokusei* riots in the Muromachi period were started by the low-class people for the purpose of getting their own debts cancelled.

There sprang up a sort of monetary organ called *mujinsen* (無盡錢) about the time the Hojo family reigned supreme, and those who ran this business had storehouses for keeping goods pawned. These storehouses were called *do-sō* (earth storehouse) because they were plastered with earth in order to avoid destruction by fire. Later, *sake* merchants ran the same business as a subsidiary business and consequently *sakaya* and *do-sō* represented the business between them. They were pawnbrokers in later days. The feudal Government, which was in financial straits, levied heavy taxes on *do-sō* and *sakaya*, and as well demanded heavy contributions from them whom it regarded as an abundant source of revenue. As for *sakaya* and *do-sō*, they resorted to various devices to protect their interests against the unfavourable condition of affairs then prevailing. Some of them made popular shrines and temples the patron of their land or sought the protection of influential *kuge* peers and *samurai* leaders by acting as though they were their employees. Heavy taxation led to higher rates of interest on pledges, and, moreover, some of them resorted to profiteering at the expense of poor pawners, with the result that strong complaints and resentment prevailed among the populace against *sakaya* and *do-sō*. What with the social system ruling, famines and epidemics, the financial circumstances of the masses were desperate, and riots were the ebullitions of the discontent which they could no longer keep down. The rioters broke into the storehouses of *sakaya* and *do-sō* and looted them, destroyed the I.O.U.'s in their keeping, and pressed the Government for the issue of a Tokusei Order for the repudiation of their debts.

These riots were not confined to Kyoto and neighbour-

hood. They spread to the provinces. Indeed, they became a common evil in this period. The populace were not the only party concerned in these disturbances, but *kuge* and *samurai*, who were economically on the verge of bankruptcy, were evidently in secret collusion with the rabble. It is perhaps more correct to interpret them as acts of insubordination on the part of the poor against the rich.

**Kuni ikki.** (國一揆) In some cases, riots assumed a different aspect. For instance, of the riots which broke out in the first year of Eikyo (1429) in Harima, Ise, Tamba, Settsu and Iga provinces, the one which occurred in Harima province had for its slogan "Down with the *samurai*," and the mob defeated the troops under Akamatsu Mitsusuke, the Shugo of the province, in the fight that ensued. In this case, the rioters aimed at the elimination of the *samurai* class; it was an attempt to undermine the social system then ruling. One which broke out in Yamashiro province was even more violent in nature.

This riot broke out in the seventeenth-eighteenth year of Bummei (1485-1486). At that time, the feud between Hatakeyama Masanaga and Hatakeyama Yoshinari was still going on. The Two Hatakeyamas set up their respective new barriers in Yamashiro province, cut off the means of mutual communication, and occupied the land belonging to shrines and temples. As these steps put many hardships on the inhabitants of the province, the local inhabitants ranging from fifteen or sixteen to sixty years of age held a conference on December 11th of the seventeenth year of Bummei, and adopted resolutions urging the withdrawal of the contending troops, the restitution of the land belonging to shrines and temples, and the removal of the new barriers. They even organised troops and pressed the Two Hatakeyamas for the acceptance of their demands. The *samurai* troops under the Hatakeyamas were sufficiently overawed by the menacing attitude of the improvised militia and withdrew, leaving the militia to undertake the guard duty within the province. On February 13th of the following year, a second

mass meeting was called at the Byōdoin Temple at Uji. At this conference, laws were made and rates of taxation were fixed. Even the lands belonging to shrines and temples were taxed. All administrative affairs in the province were transacted by the representatives of the inhabitants. This form of rule seems to have lasted for quite a long time.

About this time, Kii province was also put under the rule of the populace. "It rid itself of the local Magistrate and the farmers were the masters of the province," as an old written record describes the state of things then prevailing in the province. There were also religious riots started by believers in the Ikkō Sect or by adherents of the Nichiren Sect. The Ikkō riot in Kaga province was a most notable example of the kind. In this case, the local Magistrate was driven out of the province and the administration of the province was temporarily carried on by the mob.

In short, riots represented a big social movement of the non-propertied classes carried on intermittently for about a century. It is not correct to regard them simply as acts of violence committed by lawless people. If the low-class people had abided by their hard lot meekly and by force of habit, no trouble might have occurred, but as they lived in an age in which a rebellious spirit was manifest in all classes, and, moreover, as they were conscious of their ability to defy authority, such troubles were bound to occur. That their agitation took the form of an appeal to brute force may be taken as an illustration of the spirit of this age.

## 2. FARMERS' RIOTS IN THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD.

**The position of the farming population.** In Japan, agriculture developed in very remote days, and it formed an important industry. In the Tokugawa period, special importance was attached to it. Notwithstanding this, however, the lot of the farmers was a very hard one. Their freedom of action was ruthlessly restricted, and they were treated as

though they were merely instruments for producing taxes.<sup>2)</sup>

The farmers constituted the large majority of the people at the time, and yet their life was so wretched. The pent-up discontent found violent expression in the form of insubordination and revolt against their feudal lords and Government officials. Riots were the last and the only weapon left in their hands for employment in an attempt to escape their hardships and to protect themselves from the oppressive rule.

**Farmers' riots.** A farmers' riot was a revolt against the feudal lord or officials on the part of the farmers of a village or villages. The farmers were always groaning under heavy burdens of taxation, and when in times of famine or poor crops the authorities failed to take appropriate measures for their relief, they rose in open revolt. When the angry farmers of a village, led by their ringleaders, made a rush for the seat of the local government in a body, the villagers *en route* who shared their resentment and hardships joined the mob. Thus, like a snowball, the rioters grew in number as they went, until they sometimes reached tens of thousands. They beat drums, blew horns and rang bells as they proceeded, flying straw-mat banners and carrying weapons in the shape of bamboo spears, sickles, hoes, etc.

The farmers were forbidden to band together and make a forcible appeal to the authorities. It was called *totō* (徒黨) for farmers to concoct plots in a body, and it was called *gōso* (強訴) for them to band together for making a forcible appeal to the authorities, while for them to desert their villages by common consent was called *chosan* (逃散). Farmers' riots generally passed through three stages, that is, *toto*, *gōso* and rioting. In some cases, farmers resorted to *chosan*. For instance, in the first year of Hōreki (1751), a few thousand farmers in Katsuda district in the Tsuyama clan, unable to put up with the heavy taxation, deserted their villages in a body, carrying their food, on the pretext that they were going

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<sup>2)</sup> cf. "The Agrarian Problem in the Tokugawa Régime" in this Review, vol. I, no. 2 p. 75 etc.

to Ise to pray to the Grand Shrine there for the removal of maladministration. It is also on record that many farmers in Iyo province crossed the border into Tosa province and those in Tosa province fled into Iyo province. The flight of many farmers in Awa province into Tosa province is also a historical fact.

Farmers' riots broke out often in the Tokugawa period. Particularly frequent were they in the middle and latter days of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In some cases, a few score riots occurred in one district. Inasmuch as such a riot was essentially directed against the feudal lord or the local magistrates, one would think that it was limited to the district concerned, but as maladministration by the provincial officials and the financial straits of the farmers were matters which were common to all provinces, the trouble was highly contagious, and one riot led to many others in other provinces. Unlike movements based on doctrines, they were not carried on according to deeply-laid plans, nor were they capable of being sustained. They were temporary agitations. Like fireworks, they flared up, but only for a time.

Most riots succeeded. The ringleaders were, of course, either crucified, beheaded, banished or sentenced to heavy penalties, but the majority of their demands were accepted. The *samurai* who were attacked by the mob fled into the castle. Instead of taking any warlike action, they sent out negotiators to arrange terms with the mob, and the negotiations ended, in many cases, in the acceptance of the demands of the agitating farmers. At any rate, the farmers' riots in the Tokugawa period formed an important social movement as positive acts of hostility (negative acts of hostility in the case of *choson*) on the part of farmers against the authorities.

### 3. FARM TENANCY DISPUTES IN THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD.

**The farm tenancy system.** The farm tenancy system was in general operation in the Tokugawa period. While there were people, on the one hand, who, owing to the difficulty

of living or the undeveloped idea of land due to imperfect utilisation of land, took little care of their lands, there were people, on the other hand, who, by annexing lands, got possession of so extensive an area that they had to engage others to cultivate it. As big landowners increased in number, the operation of the farm tenancy system became general. Thus, there sprang up two classes of farmers—big farmers who did not engage in farm work themselves, and tenant farmers who had no land of their own to cultivate. There were also yeomen who cultivated their own land, and farm labourers who could not even get land to tenant.

Farm tenancy was of two kinds—*myoden kosaku* (名田小作) and *shichiji kosaku* (質地小作). It was called *myoden kosoku* to tenant land belonging to landowners, and *shichiji kosaku* it was called to tenant mortgaged land. The common form of farm tenancy was for landowners to lease their land to small farmers. Tenancy for a term of over twenty years was called *eikosaku* (永小作 perpetual or long-term tenancy). There were also two kinds of *shichiji kosaku*, namely the tenancy of land in pledge by its owners (*jiki kosaku* 直小作), and the tenancy of such land by persons other than its owners (*betsu kosaku* 別小作).

I have already described the hard lot of the farmers generally, and it is hardly necessary to say that the life of tenant farmers was simply wretched.<sup>3)</sup>

**Farm tenancy disputes.** It may appear at first sight that it was to mutual benefit that the countryfolk who had no other means of earning a livelihood should tenant land and that big landowners should put their extensive lands out to tenancy, but as a matter of fact the interests of both were not always in accord. The former were gradually relegated to the position of the oppressed and the latter assumed the position of oppressors, and trouble very often arose between them.

<sup>3)</sup> cf. "The Agrarian Problems in the Tokugawa Régime" in this Review, vol. I, no. 2 p. 85 etc.

Farm tenancy disputes were recorded as early as the Kyoho era (1716-1735). In the "*Minkan Seiyo*" (民間省要) occurs the following passage:—"In a year of Kyoho, the rice crop was particularly poor, and towards the end of the next year tenant farmers in many villages abandoned their tenanted lands to their owners, as if by common consent, refusing to cultivate them. This embarrassed the landowners considerably, and they did their utmost to placate their tenants by either consenting to reduce the rent or by giving them some money towards the cost of fertilisers. Although in this way the trouble was settled, there was still left on the hands of landowners some lands which they could not get any tenant farmers to cultivate. They, therefore, engaged farmers and bought horses to cultivate them themselves. Their personal cultivation convinced them all the more that it was by no means paying to tenant farm land, for they found that it involved cultivators in heavy expense in fertilisers, etc.

The research of the farm tenancy on the Fukano newly reclaimed farm shows that there was constant trouble between tenant farmers and their landowners or the manager of the farm. The tenant farmers agreed among themselves to keep under strict surveillance the doings of the managers who came into frequent collisions with them, because of the selfish and arrogant attitude adopted by them in the collection of the rent. It is also clear from documents dated January of the fifth year of Meiwa (1768) and the second year of Kwansei (1790), that whenever trouble occurred a make-shift solution was reached by an exchange of memorandums between the disputants.

About the era of Kokwa or Kayei (1844-1853), the tenant farmers comprising three or four hundred households at Honjo, Musashi province, made a point of preferring to their landowners a demand for a reduction in the rent every year, when the time for paying their rent came round, on the pretext of a poor harvest. In order to meet this situation, twelve landowners of the village organised a landowners'

guild and passed resolutions, according to which tenant farmers were forbidden to be out on the day of collecting the rent, those who were absent on such a day, despite the advanced notice, were to be blacklisted and denied the tenancy of the fields of these landowners, tenant farmers were forbidden to pay in rent rice, barley, peas and beans, etc. of inferior quality. It was also resolved that the amount of reduction to be made on the rent should be fixed by the majority vote among the members of the landowners' guild, and that tenant farmers who complained of the rates of reduction should be blacklisted, denying them the tenancy of their fields. Since then, it is said the tenant farmers ceased to make unreasonable demands in regard to the reduction of the rent. This does not, however, show that disputes between landowners and tenant farmers were settled satisfactorily. It simply means that tenant farmers yielded to the oppressive rule of landowners.

From the above, it will be seen that disputes between landowners and tenant farmers existed as far back as the middle period of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The methods adopted by the disputants in carrying on their disputes and pressing their demands were practically the same as those used in similar disputes in the actual present.

#### 4. *UCHIKOWASHI* (打毀 WRECKING) AGITATIONS IN THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD.

**Rice riots.** *Uchikowashi* means, in effect, rice riots. Those poor people who were hard up on account of a violent rise in the price of rice caused a riot, which was joined by outlaws. These rioters raided pawnbrokers and *sake* merchants as well as rice shops, and demolished the buildings and looted rice and other articles, or bought them at absurdly low prices under intimidation. These riots were the outcome of the antagonism of the poor against the rich and the monopolists of interests. They were in most cases caused by tradespeople in big cities. While farmers' riots represent-



ed the revolt of farmers against the authorities, *uchikowashi* was the manifestation of the hostility of the poor against the rich.

As emergency measures for coping with *uchikowashi* agitations, the authorities tried to make each street of a city take steps for self-defence. They also prohibited all people from going out of doors when such trouble was going on, while doing all they could to bring the offenders to justice. At the same time, the Shogunate granted rice and money to poor people and undertook to sell rice at moderate prices. On the other hand, it afforded protection to retail rice dealers so that they could resume business, and urged rich men and public-spirited persons to give relief to the poor. Besides, it simultaneously pursued policies for the regulation of the price of rice, such as the rice transportation policy, the reduction of consumption, the restriction of *sake* production, and the sale of rice in storage.

Many cases of *uchikowashi* broke out in the different eras of Kyoho, Temmei, Tempo, and Keio, but the most notorious of all was one which occurred in the Temmei era (1781-1788).

**The *uchikowashi* riots of Temmei era.** What is popularly known as the Temmei *uchikowashi* took place in the seventh year of Temmei (1787). Owing to the unfavourable weather conditions experienced since the previous year, the rice crops failed in many provinces. In the seventh year of Temmei (1787), the business depression, coupled with a shortage of rice, forced the price of rice still higher up. The price of rice, which was quoted at 61 *momme* (匁) in February of the fifth year of Temmei (1785) rose to 101.5 *momme* in December of the following year and to 181 to 187 *momme* in July of the seventh year of Temmei. The poverty-stricken people, who had been on the verge of starvation since the autumn of the preceeding year owing to the high prices of commodities, raided the residence of Chaya Kichiyemon at Isemachi, Temma, Osaka, in large numbers on the night of May 11th, and proceeded to wreck the furniture. On the

following day, they made raids on rice shops and forced them to sell rice at preposterously low prices. Their refusal to comply was the signal for taking out rice and other cereals by force, and wrecking the shops into the bargain. The shops attacked exceeded 200. Not only rice merchants but all other tradespeople were so terror-stricken that many of them closed their shops, with the result that serious inconvenience was caused to the officials and the citizens generally. The general closing of rice shops proved a particularly hard blow to the poor people who, being in the habit of buying rice in small quantities, had no stock of rice. The Shogunate prohibited people from going out to see the trouble going on, to say nothing of vetoing their joining in the rioting. Guards were kept in each street, and arrests of the rioters were strictly effected. Instructions were also issued to the denizens of each street to see that the necessary relief was afforded to those in distress, and the public was urged to give alms to the needy. The retail rice dealers received official protection and they were ordered to notify the authorities of the persons who might attempt to use force against them to make them sell rice at unreasonably low prices. It is said that some retail rice merchants made palings of logs in their shops and either handed rice to buyers or received money from them through small gaps in the fence.

Osaka was not the only place where riots were caused by poor people. Similar troubles broke out in Kyoto, Fushimi, Kōriyama, Sakai, Wakayama, Ishinomaki and many other places in the Kinki, Tōkai, Chugoku, Kyushu and North-East districts about the same time. The most violent of all was the one that occurred in Edo. The first victims of this *uchikowashi* in Edo were rice shops near Ogibashi bridge, Honjo, and at Rokkenbori, Fukagawa, which were attacked by a mob and wrecked on May 18th. The trouble spread rapidly, and by the dawn of the 22nd of the same month, disturbances occurred in many places, and troops were finally called out to suppress the rising.

The above-mentioned *uchikowashi* riots were, of course,

different from political riots in nature, but judging from the fact that rich people as well as rice merchants were attacked by the mobs, they may be viewed in the light of the violent expression of hostility on the part of the poor against the rich, though it is allowable that their attacks on rich people were partly due to the force of circumstances.

#### CHAPTER IV ADDENDUM.

**The collapse of the Shogunate régime.** As already mentioned, the centralised feudal system operated in the Tokugawa Age, in which class distinctions and the relationship of master and servant were strictly maintained. Things were, however, undergoing a constant change. The merchant class seized the money power in our country, and many feudal lords, who were reduced to financial straits, had to look to them for the supply of funds required for administrative purposes. In such circumstances, they became conscious of their powerful influence with the *samurai* class, while, on the other hand, the authorities found it no longer possible to ignore the interests of the commercial and industrial classes. In the latter days of the Shogunate, especially during and about the Meiwa-An-ei-Temmei era (1764-1788), farmers and *chōnin* (merchants) caused riots in many places—a demonstration of the spirit of insubordination, which permeated many classes in those days. The fact that they frequently rose in revolt against the *samurai* class, instead of submitting meekly to their oppressive rule, indicates at once the loss of influence on the part of the *samurai* class and the endeavours made by the common people to elevate their own position. In the meantime, the study of Japanese classical literature found increasing favour among the people, and there was at the same time a growth of loyalism. Moreover, the embargo on the importation of foreign books slackened after the rule of Tokugawa Yoshimune, with the result that the study of things Western came into vogue.

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There was a growing number of people who denounced the exclusionist and retrogressive policy and urged the necessity of adopting the open door and progressive policy. In this way, the new spirit was gradually fomented. The overtures made by foreign countries to this country in the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate asking for the opening of the country to foreign intercourse and trade furnished an opportunity for a political change, and this, coupled with many causes, political, economic and spiritual, finally brought about the Restoration.

**The Meiji Restoration.** The grand work achieved at the threshold of Meiji was at once the restoration of the country to the Imperial sovereignty and the establishment of a new order. The Shogunate and all the feudal lords returned their fiefs to the Imperial House and the clans were replaced by the prefectures. The whole land of Japan and her people reverted to the possession of the Emperor. This political unity brought about what is called the restoration of the Imperial Government, and the Five Imperial Oaths laid down the new constitutional national policy, which means the establishment of a new order.

So far as the relations with the outside world are concerned, the Restoration means the opening of the country, after a long period of seclusion, to intercourse with advanced Western countries. Politically, however, Japan was saddled with extraterritoriality, which denied her the status of an independent country on an equality with other countries. In economic matters, she was deprived of tariff autonomy, restrictions in the shape of conventional tariff being put upon her. In order to claim the position of equality with other countries in political matters, it was necessary to enhance the national resources and promote economic development. This was the reason why the Government pursued a policy of direct interference during the first ten years or 20 of Meiji and did its utmost to lead the nation by launching many Government enterprises. The industrial development in the Meiji era is traceable to the intensive protection which

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the Government extended to various industries. With the development of industry, a capitalistic society was established, and the new organisations, political and social, were steadily developed until they reached the western level. This political, economic and social progress was due largely to the fact that the merits of Western systems were adopted to make up for the shortcomings of Japanese systems. The Meiji civilisation was created by absorbing and assimilating Western civilisation, just as the Japanese civilisation in remote and middle ages owed much to the stimulation of imported civilisation.

**The social organisation.** The Restoration caused revolutionary changes not only in political matters but in social matters. The feudal system gave place to the system based on the centralisation of power. Class discrimination, which was at once stern and intricate, was abolished. The social system which ruled in the Tokugawa period was completely undermined as an antiquated régime.

The *samurai* class which possessed property in the shape of lands, returned their possessions to the Imperial Family on the abolition of the clans in favour of the prefectures, and got hereditary pension bonds in return. They were forbidden to wear two swords, which was formerly their privilege, and they had to make their life and living conform to the new currency economics. They entered the business world, but they were proverbially poor hands at business, and as merchants they proved complete failures. Hereupon, the Government devised plans to give employment to them, and encouraged them to organise national banks, railway and other companies, so as to make them operate these businesses along Western lines. This was a success. As business men of progressive ideas, they finally came to constitute a new influence in the Japanese economic world, with the result that they played an important part in effecting a big reform in the social and economic organisations of this country. It is, indeed, a curious irony of fate that the *samurai* class, who formerly despised money, should have ended by

constituting themselves as the forerunners of the present-day Japanese business world.

The *chōnin* (merchant) class, which gained much influence in the Tokugawa period, also lost the privileges and protection which they had enjoyed before, and they had to earn their own living in a world of free competition. The former *chōnin* were gifted with the idea of saving, it is true, but they lacked either initiative or the spirit of enterprise or a taste for business. It is, therefore, no wonder that in a capitalistic society, which was ushered in after the Restoration, the nucleus was furnished by low-class *samurai* rather than by those belonging to the *chōnin* class. The new capitalist class was somehow brought into being, and a capitalistic society was established. On the other hand, there existed a multitude of labourers and proletarians, and these formed Labour against Capital. Sandwiched between Capital and Labour were the middle-class farmers, merchants, industrialists, and salaried men. The tripartite existence of the capitalists, the middle-class people and the non-propertied class gave rise to a variety of social problems.

**The social problem is a question of wealth and poverty.**

Even remote and medieval ages were not free from the question of wealth and poverty, but in those days it did not take the form of strife between the rich and the poor. It was a problem of disparity in wealth between different social classes. After the middle ages, however, there were gradually created the rich and the poor classes, though with a somewhat blurred line of distinction at first, and a sort of social movement arose between these classes. The *tsuchi ikki*, to which reference has already been made, was a case in point. From the point of view of the social classes, rioting was a conflict between the people within the same social class, but it may more properly be described as a conflict between the rich and the poor classes. The same thing may be said of *uchikowashi* and farm tenancy disputes in the Tokugawa era. In the middle ages, there sprang up what were called vocational classes, and these classes witnessed a steady develop-

ment in the Tokugawa era. In consequence of the creation of the rich and the poor classes and vocational classes, there gradually occurred conflicts between the rich and the poor, in addition to those within the same social class or between different social classes. This was the forerunner of the class strife subsequently developing between the economic classes which came into being after the Meiji Restoration.

As already explained, even before the Meiji era, there were troubles which embodied conflicts between the rich and the poor classes rather than a question of wealth and poverty between social classes. On the whole, however, social classes retained their characteristic features in the pre-Meiji periods and the troubles were mainly between different social classes. Conflicts between the rich class and the poor class, though they occurred, were rather subordinate to those between the several social classes. After the Meiji Restoration, the social classes lost their significance, though they remained, and the economic classes that sprang up assumed much importance. Conflicts between the rich and the poor economic classes came to form important social problems in consequence. Thus, the so-called social problems or class strife of the pre-Restoration days and of the post-Restoration days are different in kind. Herein lies the significance of the Meiji Restoration, if it is studied from the point of view of the history of social movements.

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